A Historical Guide to Ontario's Chinatowns

唐人街

Over 150 years ago, the Chinese came to Canada in search of a new life. Gold drew thousands to Barkerville, B.C. - the first wave of Chinese immigration to Canada.

Thousands more came to build the Canadian Pacific Railway. When it was completed, many headed East through the Rocky Mountains.

While the majority settled in larger cities, some Chinese made their homes in smaller communities in Ontario, particularly along Highway 401.

The Chinese neighbourhoods of Toronto are still called Tong Yen Gai. Ottawa's Tong Yen Gai is located in the hub of the city's international district.

Experience Tong Yen Gai - the sights, sounds, people and tastes of Chinatown

Chinese Canadian National Council
& Chinese Canadian National Council (Toronto chapter)

HWY 401

The highway that joins Ontario's oldest Chinese communities

Along the 401 you'll find the last of the Chinese-Canadian cafés and restaurants, and hand laundries. The menu and the décor hasn't changed much over the years. The trademark café booths and counters are mostly gone, but you'll still find classic "Canadian-Chinese" dishes: chicken balls, egg rolls, chop suey and egg foo young.

Ajax: Wing's (est. 1962) is at 25 Harwood South, and still owned by the Wong family. The interior retains the original look.

Brockville's King Street still has old-style Chinese eateries, such as the New York Café (est. 1930). Renovated in the 1960s, the look is retro. Its famous chow mein bun rivals the hot chicken sandwich. Comfort food. Both Hepp's Lunch, which is open for breakfast at 6:00 a.m., and Dinah Sweets serve Chinese food.

Kingston: The Chinese settled in Kingston in the mid-1850s. In 1895, Ching Lee and Fong Suey opened laundries. The only laundry from that era that is still operating is Lee's Laundry, at the corner of Earl and Division Streets, near the university campus.

Smiths Falls: Lam's Garden Buffet Restaurant (est. 1976) is the largest Chinese restaurant in town, at 15 Greig Street.

Windsor: Nestled near the University along Wyandotte Street, Windsor's Chinatown has a variety of restaurants, food stores, bakeries and herbal shops. A popular destination for American visitors.

"Go East Young Men *and* Women"

1778 50 Chinese crewmen arrive with John Meares' ship.

1858 6,000 Chinese miners live in Barkerville, B.C.

1860 Mrs. Kwong arrives – first Chinese woman.

1861 Won Alexander Cumyow is born - first Chinese born in Canada.

1862 B.C. denies Chinese and First Nations Peoples the vote.

1863 The Hong Shun Tang is established in Barkerville - the first Chinese association.

1878 The Chinese go on strike when Victoria imposes a tax on them. Sam Chong and Wo Kee are listed in the Toronto City Directory.

1881 17,000 Chinese build the Canadian Pacific Railway; 1,500 died.

1885 The first of three Chinese Immigration Acts imposing a head-tax of $50; then $100 in 1900 and $500 in 1903.

1890 Chinese immigrants settle near York and Wellington Streets, Toronto.

1907 Race riots in Vancouver against the Chinese and Japanese.

1916 The Asian Labour Association is established in Vancouver.

1917 Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and British Columbia prohibit Chinese from hiring white women.

1920 Twenty Chinese Canadian war veterans win the right to vote.

1923 The Chinese Immigration Act (*Exclusion Act*) stops Chinese immigration for 24 years.

1945 World War II: while no Chinese are conscripted, 500 volunteer for service. Their sacrifice was the catalyst for the repeal of the *Exclusion Act*.

1946 Gretta (Wong) Grant becomes the first Chinese woman to practice law in Canada.

1947 Repeal of the *Exclusion Act* of 1923. The Chinese win the right to vote.

1956 The government allows Chinese family reunification.

1957 Douglas Jung is elected to the House of Commons.

1960 Toronto wants to build a City Hall in Old Chinatown. The Save Chinatown Campaign succeeds.

1973 The Chinese Parent's Association of Toronto successfully lobbies for Chinese language programs.

1977 Toronto's Grange Community Coalition opposes commercial development in New Chinatown (Spadina & Dundas Street).

1979 National demonstration against CTV's W-5 programme, "Campus Giveaway", depicting Chinese Canadian students as "foreigners". A public apology is issued (1981) and the Chinese Canadian National Council for Equality (CCNC) is formed.

1984 CCNC launches a redress campaign on behalf of head-tax payers and their descendents.

1989 Chinese across Canada join an international campaign for democratic reform in China. Over 30,000 Torontonians protest on June 4th against the Tiananmen Square Massacre.

1998 Vivienne Poy is appointed to the Senate.

1999 Adrienne Clarkson becomes Canada's Governor-General.

2000 CCNC celebrates its 20th anniversary.

2001 CCNC commences legal action for head-tax redress.

Photo: City of Toronto Archives

Welcome to Toronto Area Chinatowns

The Greater Toronto Area (GTA) is home to more than 400,000 Chinese - one of the largest Chinese communities in North America.

In the early days, the Chinese were scattered throughout Toronto. By the 1900s, they moved into a Jewish neighbourhood in the Queen and Dundas St. area, near Elizabeth Street. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the City built a new City Hall in Chinatown forcing businesses to relocate to Dundas Street west of Bay St., "*Old Chinatown*".

Urban development threatened Old Chinatown again, in 1969. The "Save Chinatown Committee", led by Jean Lumb and other community leaders, fought to keep Old Chinatown alive and to allow Chinese businesses to expand further west along Dundas St. to Spadina St., "*New Chinatown*".

"New Chinatown"

1. *Cecil Street Community Centre*, is formerly the Ostrowiec Synagogue.

2. *Chinese United Dramatic Society*, 350 Dundas Street.

3. Toronto Taoist Tai Chi Association's *Fung Loy Kok Institute of Taoism*, 134 D'Arcy Street.

4. *Mon Sheong Home for the Aged* (est. 1974) 36 D'Arcy Street.

5. *Deep Quong Non-Profit Homes* 106 Beverley Street, named after head-tax payer and community activist.

6. *First Baptist Church* (est. 1826), 101 Huron Street.

7. *a) Chinese Presbyterian Church*, 177 Beverley Street. b) *Chinese Catholic Centre – Our Lady of Carmel Church*, 202 St. Patrick Street. c) *Chinese Gospel Church*, 410 Dundas Street.

8. *Kensington Market.*

9. *Chinatown Centre.*

10. *Dragon City Centre.*

11. *University Settlement House* – first Chinese community social service agency, 23 Grange Road.

Not to miss: the monument for Chinese railroad workers at the Sky Dome

"Old Chinatown"

A. *Sam Ching and Company, laundry*, 9 Adelaide Street (1877). Sam Ching is believed to be the first Chinese in Toronto. By 1890, thirty of Toronto's sixty-nine laundries were Chinese-owned.

B. *Wing Tai and Company*, a "fancy goods" store, was at 405 Yonge Street.

C. *Chinese Freemasons*, was at 92 York Street. (1905).

D. *Quong Ying Yune Company*, tea shop, was at 69 1/2 Queen Street West (1902).

E. In 1910, the *Chinese Christian Association* (Young Men's Christian Institute, YMCI) was at 134 Church Street and later moved to 474 University Avenue.

F. *Chinese Presbyterian Church* (1914) was at 187 Church Street. In 1919, it moved to 124 University Avenue.

G. The *Chinese Bay Street Mission* was at 56 Elm Street.

H. *Ship Toy Yuen Dramatic Society and Theatre* was at 126 Elizabeth Street (1935).

I. *Cooke's Presbyterian Church* was at 88 Queen Street East.

J. *Shing Wah Daily News*, Toronto's first Chinese newspaper (1916) was at 12 Hagerman Street.

K. *Kwong Chow Restaurant* was at 126 Elizabeth Street.

L. *Kew Dock Yip*, the first Chinese Canadian lawyer (1945) had a storefront law office at 117A Elizabeth Street (1945-1984). Mr. Yip championed the repeal of the Exclusion Act.

M. *Ship-Toy-Yen Society*, a mutual aid association, was at 113 Elizabeth Street.

N. The *Yueh Tung and the Ho King* (on Spadina Street) serve Lo Wah Kiu (Chinese pioneers) dishes such as shrimp with lobster sauce (poor man's lobster), bitter melon with beef, steamed pork with salted duck egg and sub gum chow mein.

LEGEND

EARLY SITES OF INTEREST (IN RED)
CONTEMPORARY SITES (IN BLACK)
* *map not to scale*

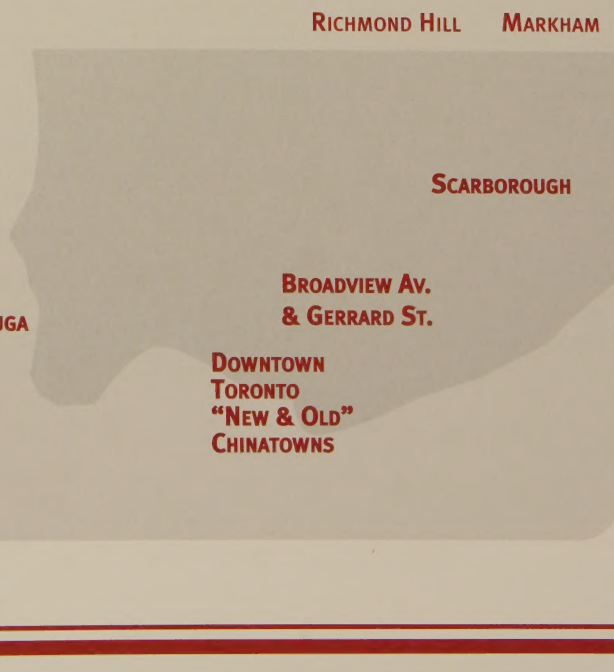
Enjoy the people, the sights and tastes of these great neighbourhoods in the GTA

Broadview Avenue & Gerrard Street Chinatown took root in the late 1960s. The first shop was the Kung Kee Store at 383A Broadview.

Scarborough's Chinatown started out, in the 1960s, as a few shops and restaurants at Glen Watford Plaza at Sheppard Avenue East and Midland Avenue. In 1984, a roller skating rink was converted into the Dragon Mall. Market Village, the Pacific Mall and the Yee Hong Centre for Geriatric Care are in the adjacent town of Markham. In 1995, the Deputy Mayor of Markham alleged that the Chinese were "driving away the back-bone of Markham". Her comments sparked outrage among ethno-cultural and community groups.

Mississauga's Chinese Centre Plaza, at 888 Dundas Street West (est. 1990s), has supermarkets, shops and restaurants. There you'll find a fabulous replica of the famous "Nine Dragon Wall" (made of 66,000 cubic feet of timber).

Richmond Hill & Markham, "Bay Street of the North", is the newest attraction for Chinese businesses. It boasts some of the finest cuisine in the Greater Toronto Area.



Ottawa - the nation's capital

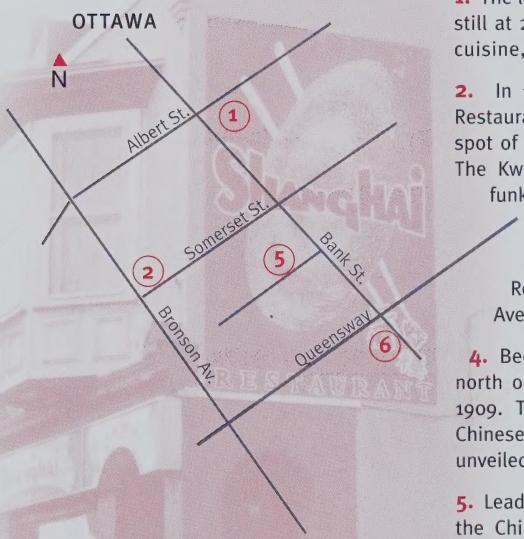
In 1891, there were 5 Chinese living in Ottawa; in 1951, there were 404 and most were men; by 1971, there were 2,340 – still mostly men. Today, there are more than 20,000 residents of Chinese background in the capital region.

Many pioneer Chinese ran laundries because small businesses required little start-up costs. Ottawa's original Chinatown was along Albert Street. In 1914, there were 3 laundries, 1 restaurant and the Wing On grocery store. At one time, there were 15 Chinese restaurants, grocery stores and social clubs bounded by Albert, Kent and O'Connor Streets. The Nationalist League (Kuomingtang), established in 1916, was located at 196 O'Connor Street.

In the 1930s, the Boston Café was on Rideau Street, the Capital Lunch on Dalhousie Street and the De Luxe Restaurant on Queen Street.

In the 1940s, restaurants serving Canadian-style food were established along Albert Street: the Canton Inn (#205), Ding Hong (#219) and the Ho Ho (#248). There was also the Leopold Boyle (Montreal Road), the Cavendish Café (Sparks Street) and the Arcadia Grill (Bank Street).

Office buildings appeared on Albert Street in the 1960s. Chinese businesses moved to Ottawa's International District, Somerset West. Ottawa's Tong Yen Gai is characterized by storefronts nestled in charming wood-framed houses.



1. The last of the original restaurants, Cathay House (1947) is still at 228 Albert Street. One of the first to serve Chinese cuisine, it was the local gathering place for the community.

2. In 1971, Allen and Nancy Kwan opened the Shanghai Restaurant at 651 Somerset Street West. A favourite eating spot of former Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau and his family. The Kwan children now run the business. Renovated and funky, the Shanghai still has old favourites on the menu.

3. Familiar places to eat are still the Yangtze (est. 1982) at 700 Somerset Street West, and the Lucky Key Restaurant with its distinctive pagoda at 1272 Carling Avenue (not shown on map).

4. Beechwood Cemetery, 280 Beechwood Avenue in Vanier, north of Ottawa, is where Chinese have been buried since 1909. The Ottawa Chinese Cemetery was established by the Chinese Benevolent Society in 1926. In 1996, a pagoda was unveiled in honour of Chinese pioneers (not shown on map).

5. Leaders from the Joe, Sim and Hum families, together with the Chinese Benevolent Society, joined in Kew Dock Yip's efforts to repeal the 1923 Exclusion Act. In the mid-1950s, the Chinese Community Association was formed to serve the community and in 1982, it opened the Chinese Community Building at 80 Florence Street to house Chinese seniors.

6. The Chinese Christian Mission at 314 Lisgar Street held the first Chinese language classes. In 1962, it became the Ottawa Chinese United Church and in 1984 relocated to 600 Bank Street.

The Chinese Canadian National Council (est.1981) & CCNC Toronto Chapter is a non-profit, community-based organization that seeks to promote the rights of all individuals, in particular, those of Chinese Canadians, and to encourage their full and equal participation in Canadian society.
Suite 507, 302 Spadina Avenue, Toronto M5T 2E7 416-977-9871 (national) or 416-596-0833 (Toronto chapter)

Produced by: Multicultural History Society of Ontario • © All Text and Images, 2003

This project funded by the Ontario Trillium Foundation. Designed by: Ceneda Creative /Suyin Looui